

Mid-term Assignment:

Directions: Choose ONE of the following questions and answer it in an essay of no more than 800 words. In your answer, be sure to refer explicitly to the video lectures, as well as to any other course materials, discussions from the class forums, and/or personal reflections or experiences that may be relevant.

Remember, a good essay will do more than simply state a position on the question. A good essay will also give specific reasons and evidence in support of that position, and will show why that evidence supports the position.

Question 2: The Buddha makes the claim, which may draw some support from modern psychology, that the self does not exist. Describe the self that the Buddha says does not exist and explain the Buddha's principal argument against it. Do you agree or disagree with the Buddha's argument that this kind of self doesn't exist? Or are you unable to take a position? Give two specific reasons for your view, and explain your reasons support either the existence of the self or the non-existence of the self, or why they explain why you are unable to take a position on the question.

Budd has not self. Someone is charged with pretending to defend the indefensible: that the I, myself, the one writing these letters and words, does not exist. Two worlds collide in this one single statement. Why would someone human being, the one we call The Buddha, would go as far as to imply that he, while existing in the physical realm of his human body, while surviving and thriving as a species with an inexorable goal of having to stay alive (truth of suffering), was not. Act one.

Why 'not self' and not a 'no self'? The former is trying to name the unnameable. The latter the radical notion of complete non-existence. We can deny that we are souls: but we cannot deny that we have bodies. So, let's go look for us in the body. And in the body, I found it not. As professor Robert Wright points out in his lectures, modern psychology is realizing the very same uncomfortable fact that the self, this very selves we own, are thinking by its own. Yes, it is all a confabulation. Very disconcerting indeed. We are and we are not, two strikes and no goal. Thus, not self.

Strike one: we know that we are our bodies. We, so it seems, are doing exactly what we are told. That is what many like to call the passions. A body running wild and running free, doing whatever it wants just because what it really wants is just to get laid (On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life). And if we search very carefully where to find this self-produced self as a determination of any single part of our body, we are left completely without a clue to where it went. Too close, not see, too far, see not*.

The same rings true for our feelings as these are too a product of our bodies. And we feel so many things, in so many ways, that we are these and none of these? For which one? And what about our perceptions? Or our mental formations? and finally our own consciousness. A dead-end (Reduction ad absurdum). Strike two. Buddha is still on. And now me. What do I think about this? Well, I wrote it, didn't I? The evidence seems solid, and I find no flaw in the reasoning. I'm somewhere past the middle. And I must be careful.